



KNOW! HOW TO BALANCE WORK AND PLAY

Throughout the school year, children and teens balance academics, activities, social commitments, and other expectations. A busy schedule can feel exciting—or become overwhelming.² Caregivers can support school-life balance by checking in and helping youth build routines that allow time for sleep, schoolwork, movement, relationships, and unstructured time.^{1,2}



TIPS FOR SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

Balancing work and play is a team effort. School staff can encourage students to consider whether their schedules allow enough time for sleep, schoolwork, relationships, movement, and downtime. When stress starts to get in the way of learning or well-being, staff can help students identify trusted adults and connect families with appropriate supports in and out of the school.^{8,10}

Consider asking students how their current schedule affects their well-being, whether they have time to care for themselves, and who they can turn to when they need support.

The goal isn't to create a perfect schedule, but one that gives young people time to learn, rest, connect, and enjoy the things they love. Regular check-ins and small adjustments can help make busy weeks feel more manageable and give young people the support they need to find a healthy balance between work and play.

1. REVIEW THE SCHEDULE

Sit down with your child or teen to review their daily routine and create a schedule that makes room for school, homework, activities, meals, transportation, sleep, family, friends, and downtime.^{5,3}

Extracurricular activities can support friendships, physical activity, skill-building, enjoyment, and confidence—but balance matters.³ Consider how the entire schedule affects everyday life. If your child regularly misses sleep or meals, struggles with homework, withdraws from others, or becomes distressed, it may be time to adjust their schedule.^{1,2}

Talking Tips: “What are you looking forward to during the week, and what feels like too much?”

2. PROTECT SLEEP, EXERCISE, AND DOWNTIME

When planning school and extracurricular activities, protect time for sleep, movement, and downtime. Sleep supports healthy development, attention, learning, and behavior. Children ages 6–12 need 9–12 hours of sleep each day, while teens ages 13–18 need 8–10 hours. Limiting screen time and caffeine before bed can support healthy sleep.⁴

Youth ages 6–17 also need at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day.⁷ Sports, walking, biking, dancing, and active play all count. Encourage activities they enjoy to make movement a natural part of their routine.

Talking Tip: “How is your body feeling with the new school schedule—tired, energized, tense, or somewhere in between?”

3. HELP MAKE SCHOOLWORK MANAGEABLE

Large projects and multiple assignments can sometimes feel overwhelming. Help your child build effective time-management skills to reduce stress by breaking down large assignments into smaller steps and using a weekly schedule to plan projects and other tasks. A distraction-free homework area, enough time to finish assignments, and tools like checklists or timers can also help.⁵

If schoolwork consistently takes up so much time that it limits sleep, meals, relationships, or downtime, talk to the teacher or school about what support may be available.

Talking Tip: “Could it help to break that project into smaller steps, make a plan together, or ask your teacher for help?”

4. MAKE ROOM FOR CONNECTION AND JOY

Balance includes meaningful connections, enjoyable activities, and unstructured time. Encourage kids and teens to step away from social media and spend time with trusted people, interests, and hobbies that promote relaxation and healthy stress management.^{2,5,6}

School connectedness is also a powerful protective factor. Students who feel cared for, supported, and valued are more likely to experience positive health and academic outcomes.⁸ Ask about their school relationships and help them identify at least one trusted adult or supportive peer.

Talking Tip: “Who at school makes you feel like you belong?”

5. IDENTIFY WHEN STRESS IS MORE THAN A BUSY SCHEDULE

Even with healthy routines, balancing school, activities, relationships, and responsibilities can be stressful.² Watch for signs that stress is becoming difficult to manage, including ongoing irritability, withdrawal from favorite activities, significant changes in eating or sleeping, frequent headaches or stomachaches, or difficulty completing everyday tasks.^{1,9}

These signs are an opportunity to check in and offer support. If concerns continue or interfere with daily life, consider contacting a school counselor, school psychologist, or qualified mental health professional.¹ A calm, supportive response can help young people feel heard and more comfortable seeking help.^{1,2}

Talking Tip: “I’ve noticed that things seem harder than normal lately. I want to understand what you’re going through. Is there anything that I could do to help right now?”

6. DO A REGULAR BALANCE CHECK

As routines and responsibilities change, check in with your child or teen regularly.² Try asking:

- “What is going well this week?”
- “What feels stressful or harder than expected?”
- “Are you getting enough sleep and time for meals, movement, friends, family, and downtime?”
- “Is there anything on the schedule you want to change?”
- “Is there an adult at school or home you want more help from?”

RESOURCES

- <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/back-school.html>
- <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/stress.html>
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/The-Importance-of-Family-Routines.aspx>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-schools/parents/resources.html>

SOURCES

1. <https://www.apa.org/topics/children/stress>
2. <https://www.apa.org/topics/children/school-anxiety>
3. <https://childmind.org/article/finding-the-balance-with-after-school-activities/>
4. <https://restoredcdc.org/www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-education/staying-healthy/sleep.html>
5. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/back-to-school-tips.aspx>
6. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx>
7. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-education/guidelines/index.html>
8. <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-behavior/school-connectedness/index.html>
9. <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/children>
10. <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health-action-guide/strategies/enhance-connectedness.html>

Scan for additional Know!
Prevention Tips for Everyone:

